

OBSERVATIONS

ON SOME OF THE

A R T I C L E S

O F

DIET AND REGIMEN, &c.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.



3
OBSERVATIONS

ON SOME OF THE

A R T I C L E S

O F

DIET AND REGIMEN

USUALLY RECOMMENDED TO

VALETUDINARIANS.

By WILLIAM FALCONER, M.D. F.R.S. *L*

L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR EDWARD AND CHARLES DILLY,
IN THE POULTRY. MDCCLXXVIII.

OBSERVATIONS

ON SOME OF THE

ARTICLES

OF

THE REGIMENT



BY WILLIAM ELLIOTT, M.D.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR JAMES AND CHARLES SMITH,
IN THE STREET, NEAR ST. MARTIN'S CHURCH.

OBSERVATIONS

ON SOME OF THE

ARTICLES

OF

DIET AND REGIMEN, &c.

IT must be obvious to every person conversant in the science of medicine, that the dietetic part of it, or that which respects our regimen and way of life, has not been improved in equal pro-

B

portion

portion with that which regards the administration of medicines. This was observed several years ago by an experienced and learned * practitioner, and I believe there is no reason to think that the case is altered since his time. This inattention has arisen from several causes. Few of the modern writers on the *Materia Medica* consider substances merely nutritive, or such as are used in diet, however they may differ from each other in their nature, as coming within their sphere, so that this subject is scarcely directly treated of under any of the branches into which the study of medicine is at present divided. Nutrition indeed itself, and the substances that conduce to it, are considered as a part of physiology; but this is more with reference to the mode of its being performed, and the effects of the sub-

* Dr. Huxham. Vide his Essay on Fevers.

stances employed in it upon a healthy body, than with respect to the proper choice of them in various disorders. Few likewise of the modern practical writers are very explicit on this subject, and their directions relative to it are more commonly drawn from reasoning and theory, or the authority of former writers, than any actual experience of the effects of the substances recommended or forbidden. In respect of attention to this point, we are far inferior to the ancients.

Hippocrates hardly describes a disease without recommending a regimen of life adapted to its cure; and this circumstance, which in reality is greatly to his credit, has been, I am persuaded, one of the grounds of the objections made against his practice, as being in many cases frivolous and ineffectual.

ficacious, which would have been in a great measure obviated, had many of the substances he advises been considered as articles of diet rather than of medicine.

His commentator Galen, and his follower Celsus, have both imitated his example in this respect, as there is scarce a disorder treated of by them, wherein there is not a very diffuse and particular account of the regimen, and way of life which they conceive to be best suited to its cure.

Aretæus likewise, perhaps the most judicious of any of the ancient writers, has laid so much stress on this article in many disorders, that he has declared the whole of the cure depends on an attention to the regulation of the diet and way of life; and this not in chronic
nical

nical causes only, but in acute ones also.

The same observation holds good with respect to the other most approved writers of antiquity on the subject of medicine, and I am apt to think that the disregard of those which has been of late so studiously inculcated by several of the modern professors of that science, and which succeeded to the extravagant veneration formerly paid to them, has diminished the attention of the faculty to this branch; and in that respect, as well as many others, has been of no service to medicine, either as a science or a practical art. Another circumstance seemingly trivial, that has caused this part of medicine to be less considered, is, that the directions for the medicines only are accustomed to be given in writing; whereas those

which regard diet and regimen, are generally in cases which require medical attendance, only delivered verbally, which has in some measure caused them to be less attended to, and even held as inferior in their nature and consequence to those which concern the apothecary.

The difficulty likewise of procuring a compliance with rules of regimen and diet, has also proved a great obstacle to any improvement that might have been produced by practice and observation.

These causes, among many others, have contributed to produce that rotin of practice so conspicuous in the present age with regard to this circumstance. To correct this in general, and lay down rules of diet and regimen adapted to the various disorders incident

to

to human life, would be a highly useful, though extremely arduous undertaking. Such a one, however, would much exceed the limits of the present pamphlet, which is not meant to treat of the subject in general, but to endeavour to amend some errors into which many practitioners have fallen, from indiscriminately following great names in the profession.

And here I would observe, that in every case wherein we wish to preserve the strength as entire as possible, as in most chronical complaints, we should be extremely cautious in prescribing a rigid regimen with respect to diet, especially if such regimen is intended to be long continued.

This circumstance deserves particular attention on several accounts. Few persons

sons, even of the best health, can, without disgust, bear to be confined to a peculiar food or way of living for any length of time (which is a strong argument that variety of food is natural to mankind); and if so, the debilitated stomach of Valetudinarians cannot be expected to be less * affected.

Now in the human body the taste seems to be the index or sign of the substance being agreeable to the stomach, or fit for digestion; at least it may be said that things disagreeable to the palate seldom digest well, or contribute

* Hippocrates cautions against this very properly in chronic diseases—*Quapropter hoc admoneo ut dicentibus quidem attendant, facientibus autem incumbant & contractam victus rationem non diu prescribant. Ægrotantis enim diuturnam concupiscentiam erigit indulgentia etiam in morbo diuturno.*—Hippocrates *Præceptiones*, Cap. XI.

towards

towards the nourishment of the body; a circumstance of the most especial concern. A rigid regimen of diet I have also observed frequently to have an ill effect on the spirits, by continually reminding the patients of their valetudinary state; by a comparison of their situation with that of others who enjoy greater liberty in these respects.

Another ill effect of a regimen of diet is, that it tends to diminish the quantity of food taken in, which conduces greatly to weaken the body, not only on account of the defect of quantity of nourishment, though that is of no small importance, but also by other means.

The filling of the stomach at stated intervals to a certain degree with food, seems necessary to the health of the human

human frame, not on account only of the nourishment it supplies, but also of the tension thereby produced on the fibres of the stomach, which is from thence communicated to the system, and serves also to excite such a degree of reaction in the stomach itself, and alimentary canal, as to enable it to digest the food, and distribute the nourishment properly through the System. It is therefore probable then, that when a quantity of the food is subtracted, the body suffers not only from defect of nutriment, but also from want of its accustomed stimulus and firmness of fibre, which were used to be imparted to it at certain periods.

It is probable also, that when the food is taken in an under proportion, that for the reasons above given, it would neither be itself so well digested,
nor

nor the chyle it affords so perfectly assimilated. A healthy stomach is indeed enabled to accommodate itself without much inconvenience to considerable varieties in this respect, but where its powers are debilitated, the smallest difference may be of the utmost importance.

I imagine also, that a diminution of the quantity of food has another effect, which is a very common attendant on an impaired digestion, viz. that of inducing a costive habit. When the reaction of the stomach is inconsiderable, little tension is communicated to the intestines, and of consequence their propulsive power is much weakened, especially as the bulk of the food is too small to prove any considerable stimular to the bowels themselves.

These

These circumstances duly considered, ought to make physicians very cautious in limiting the mode of living, and particularly the quantity of food under such circumstances.

I would here also particularly object against some of those preposterous attempts to combine together food and medicine, which I have frequently observed. Thus I have many times seen infusions of bitter and foetid herbs, such as the *carduus benedictus*, flowers of chamæmel, and the marsh trefoil, commonly called buckbean, directed to be taken at breakfast, in place either of nutritive substances, or such as by their agreeable flavour promoted the taking in of nourishment. I have also seen the same recommended in some measure at dinner; and I hardly need add, that in all such cases I have observed the appetite
and

and strength to be impaired, and all the bad symptoms succeed that arise from a defect of nourishment. But this, considerable as it may be, is not the only inconvenience. It frequently causes medicinal courses of this kind to be longer continued than is consistent either with the intentions of the physician, or the health of the patient. Besides most of the substances recommended on these occasions, are of the bitter kind, and it is well known that the long continued use of bitters is very hazardous to the health and constitution.

The famous Portland Powder for the gout was nothing more than a combination of strong bitters, which had indeed the effect of preventing the painful returns of that complaint in inflammation of the extremities, but was almost always attended with the most pernicious

nicious consequence to health and life. Nor are the ill effects of the long continued use of bitters to be apprehended by those only who are subject to the gout, since they act by injuring the tone of the stomach, and if long persisted in, will entirely destroy its villous coat. This will shew the danger of employing them for a long period together, whatever the circumstances of the health may be.

Another piece of advice which I have known sometimes given to those whose stomach and digestion is weak, is, to take their food as dry as possible, or to drink as little as they can of any liquid with their meat.

This is among other things advised by Dr. Cadogan, in his treatise on the gout and other chronical diseases. How
this

this came to be made an article of regimen in general, I am at a loss to say, or how the thirst came to be thought a less certain sign than hunger, of the proper degree of indulging a natural appetite*. Excess in either is obviously prejudicial, but of the two, provided spirituous liquors be not the object, it is less dangerous to exceed in quantity of liquid than of solid food†. I have myself frequently seen this restriction put

* Fidi autem (sitis & fames) naturæ duces sunt.—Haller.

Cum porro eadem causæ sitim faciant quæ faciunt necessitatem bibendi, æquum est eadem mensurâ & finem obtineri ob quem bibitur, & terminum facere desiderii.—Adeo fidelis est horum desideriorum vox, ut etiam speciem cibi potusque, omnino aptissimè distinguant. Haller Phys. vol. VI. p. 188.

† Magis in cibo minus in potu peccatur cujus major portio possit quasi infundi, quia ventriculo non retinetur. Haller. Physiol. vol. 6. p. 254.

in

in practice, but never with any good effect; and generally the consequence of it was, to produce or increase a constive habit, which is itself a frequent and troublesome symptom in these disorders.

To avoid all vegetable food, fruit, and even bread, and to use animal food for the solid part of our diet, has been, and still is sometimes recommended in cases of bad digestion, attended with flatulence, acidity, and other symptoms that usually accompany such complaints. This has been, no doubt, advised upon the supposition that animal food will not run either into the vinous or acetous fermentation, and of consequence produce neither flatulence nor acidity either in the stomach or intestines. But the truth of this theory is very much to be doubted.

It

It has been found impracticable for any person to subsist on animal food alone for even a few days, as a putrid disposition of the body soon begins to take place, as is manifested by the nausea and thirst which almost constantly occur.

Some mixture of vegetable food then is necessary to the support of life. But a composition of animal and vegetable substances is subject to both the vinous and acetous fermentations, as appears by Sir John Pringle's experiments on animal and vegetable decoctions, all of which became in time acedent. Nay, he even found that an admixture of animal matter both accelerated and heightened the acetous fermentation to a great degree.

C

Animal

Animal diet then alone is not capable of obviating these symptoms, and I greatly suspect that in many instances it aggravates them considerably. Animal and vegetable substances generate air during the putrefactive fermentation, as well as during the vinous or acetous, and this is observable in putrid fevers, wherein foetid eructations are very frequent and troublesome; and for the cure of which vegetable substances are highly efficacious,

This is also further exemplified in the scurvy; a high degree of which is very apt to be produced by a long continued use of this diet. I have never observed myself flatulence to be increased by the moderate proportion of vegetables, provided they were dressed, and either of the root kind, as potatoes,

ries, &c. or farinaceous seeds, as rice, barley, &c.

Bread likewise, and perhaps with still less reason than any of the other vegetable substances, is often included in the general prohibition. This perhaps is the most mistaken as well as dangerous piece of advice that can possibly be given. The use of bread is as ancient as the history of mankind, and at the same time so universal, that without something of this nature no people seem to live. Even the dreary Laplander, though from the asperity of his climate unable to raise corn, makes a substitute for bread of the inner rind of the pine-tree mixed with dried fishes, which does not appear to be used so much with a view to the nourishment it affords, as that it supplies a food of a proper consistence. For this mankind have an

universal appetite, which is not difficult to account for. The digestion of our food depends in a great degree on the mixture of the animal fluids in every stage of it; one of the first and perhaps the principal of these is the saliva, which is constantly present in all animals, even in insects. To draw this fluid forth from the glands that secrete it, a solid food is necessary as a stimulus, and to afford a sufficient pressure; and it is likewise requisite that it should be dry as well as solid, in order to absorb the fluid thus pressed out. Mild, slippery, and fluid aliments, are too inert to act as a stimulus, too soft to impart a pressure, and make too short a stay in the mouth to exert any effect in this way, and are moreover not fitted to absorb the glandular liquor.

Bread

Bread likewise being necessary to be chewed before it be swallowed, has another superiority over fluid aliment, as the action of the mouth, in performing that operation, tends to press out the salivary glands, while the saliva itself, by means of the action of the teeth, is mixed properly with the food. It is likewise of the utmost service in uniting the oily and watery parts of our food, for which nothing is better adapted than bread, assisted by a previous manducation. As a solid body, bread also, when received into the stomach, stimulates and presses out the glands, and produces a proper supply of the gastric liquor, which is likewise a purpose not to be attained by mere fluid aliment. Nor is bread thus prepared much liable to the objections generally made to it and other vegetable food, viz. of generating flatulence

and acidity. It has already passed in a great measure through the stage of the vinous fermentation, and therefore can undergo it only imperfectly a second time, and its intimate mixture with the animal fluids, the saliva particularly, prevents the acetous fermentation going to any great length; which last indeed, when it takes place, causes the bread to become in a degree purgative, and of consequence to be sooner evacuated.

But in reality the acetous fermentation of which bread is capable, is scarce ever increased to any great degree, and the four or leavened cakes *, in which this fermentation is purposely promoted, do not appear by experience to give

* This is probably owing to the heat used in the baking, which acts very powerfully in stopping fermentation.

any

any uneasiness by their acidity, and are found by many a great preventative of flatulence, as having already compleated the vinous fermentation, they no longer give out air.

Such then are some of the advantages attending the use of bread in our diet. Let us now see how these can be compensated by substituting animal food in the room of it.

Animal food as being in itself stimulant and of a solid consistence, may have the same effects as bread, in compressing the salival glands, and those also of the stomach; but as its pores are already filled with a fluid, it does not so well absorb the saliva, or mix so intimately with it. It is likewise destitute of a proper intermedium for uniting the oily and watery parts, in both
of

of which animal substances abound so largely. They are therefore very apt to separate, and the oily part as the lightest to swim at top, which causes those oily eructations which flame in the fire, which people of weak digestion are liable to, and which I have myself observed to be much more frequent with those to whom bread is prohibited; and which symptom I have seen manifestly relieved by returning to the use of that substance. The leaving off bread has also another ill effect in preventing the taking in of sufficient nourishment, animal food itself being extremely apt to pall and nauseate the stomach, and of consequence to be taken in less quantity than if a proportion of vegetable food was joined with it. But the most material inconvenience this kind of diet produces, is, by the putrid tendency of the animal

mal fluids; which it brings on if long continued, and which the use of bread alone is sufficient in a great measure to obviate.

Butter likewise has been generally advised to be abstained from by those whose digestion is weak and stomach flatulent. The use of butter, or some substitute for it, as oil, is, as far as we can learn, equally ancient, and nearly as universal as that of bread. It is described in the earliest histories as constituting a part of the food of mankind, and seems to have been particularly used in those countries in which a vegetable diet was the most general.

The propriety of the use of something of this kind in food, seems to be established from the general practice, nor is it difficult to be accounted for.

Vegetable

Vegetable substances, and even some animal ones, when dressed by fire, seem to require some oily substance to be taken with them, in order to render them acceptable to the taste. Thus butter or oil is universally desired with boiled vegetables, and with fish, especially those of the more insipid kind, and which themselves contain little oily matter. This seems to be from a natural instinct implanted probably for the purpose of rendering such substances more easy of digestion, and proper for nourishment.

Oily substances themselves are extremely nutritious, as is evidenced by the effects of those foods which contain most oil, as animal food, oily vegetables, and milk, which are well known to have a great tendency to fatten

ten those animals that are fed upon them.

Oily substances besides are not only directly nutritive, but likewise contribute towards supplying the oil necessary in the animal œconomy, as the membrana adiposa, the marrow, the oily part of the bones, &c. of which there is a constant waste, and which requires to be frequently renewed.

Nor is oil useful in the system for the above purposes only, as it is necessary to produce the gelatinous and mucous, as well as the oily parts, such as the synovia of the joints, the mucus of the bowels, &c. which as Haller imagines, are secreted from the matter contained in the adipose membrane.

It

It is likewise probable, as Haller suggests, that oil is necessary in our diet to provide a supply of bile, which is mostly composed of an oily matter, and to the generation of which a constant supply of that kind must be necessary.

Such are some of the uses of oily food relative to the system, or when absorbed by the lacteal or lymphatic vessels; but it is also of considerable importance in the article of digestion, and for other purposes in the stomach and intestines.

Oily substances are of great efficacy in checking the vinous fermentation, as we see by experience, that a very small quantity of oil will stop, or at least considerably retard the fermentation of a large bulk of any liquor in
that

that state, and perhaps its effects in stopping the ebullition of sugar, for which purpose it is used by those who prepare this commodity, may be owing to a similar cause.

Tis probable that our fondness for butter with vegetables, and for cream with some raw fruits, may be owing to a natural appetite suggested to us on the above account.

The presence of oil in the stomach and bowels, seems also to be necessary for covering or moderating the acrimony of several parts of our food, as the pungency or stimulus of several vegetables, particularly of the spice kind, or the filiquose plants, with which oil indeed is generally combined, as in salads, &c.

A proportion of oil in our aliment appears also to be requisite to keep the alvine evacuations in a regular state. Whether this effect be produced by its lubricating the bowels, and thus facilitating the passage of the food through them, or by its assisting to generate bile, or to form the natural mucus of the intestines, I cannot determine; but from repeated experience, I have good reason to think the fact sufficiently ascertained.

Such, among many others, are the purposes which an admixture of oil in our food serves in the animal economy. Some inconveniencies it undoubtedly sometimes produces, especially where the action of the stomach and digestion is impaired. In these cases it is apt to separate from the other parts of the food, and swim on the top, and

and thus produce those oily eructations before spoken of, which are generally esteemed to be among the most certain marks of an impaired digestion. It is likewise, when thus separated, apt to become rancid, and then produces that sensation about the pit of the stomach, resembling the heartburn, which is especially observable whenever the butter or oil has been exposed to any considerable degree of heat.

But the former of these inconveniencies, I am satisfied is generally owing, at least in a great measure, to the regimen of life usually advised in such cases, and particularly to the forbidding of bread, one of the principal uses of which is to promote the due mixture of the oily parts with the remainder of the food; and as to the latter, it in a great degree depends on
the

the other, and may often be in a great measure remedied by care in the choice of our food, and caution in dressing, that it be not exposed to too vehement a heat, as in such cases it is apt to produce a disagreeable stimulus, and is also not nearly so miscible with the animal fluids, as if none, or a moderate heat only had been employed.

On a review of these arguments I cannot help being of opinion, that the prohibition of butter and oily substances to persons in a valetudinary state, is by much too indiscriminate. In cases where the habit is corpulent, and inconveniences obviously arise from thence, such a restriction is highly proper and necessary, but these scarce ever occur where the stomach and appetite are impaired, in which cases the indications in general are of a contrary kind ; to support the
 strength,

strength, and of consequence the bulk of the body as much as possible.

Most hypochondriacal cases are of this kind: the subjects of which are commonly of a lean and spare habit of body, which is indeed a symptom of the complaint, of the recovery from which there is no sign more certain than the regaining or acquiring a due proportion of flesh and plumpness.

I think I have been able to observe several inconveniencies of the kind before mentioned, to arise from a restraint in this article of diet, and this without any alleviation of the symptoms it was intended to relieve; and have several times seen such persons return to their former diet, and a moderate use of substances of this kind in their food, not only without any aggravation, but

D

often

often with a manifest abatement of their troublesome symptoms.

I am sensible indeed that if we were to attend to the accounts given by many valetudinary persons, we might be apt to conceive the most dreadful consequences liable to occur in many cases from the use of butter or oily substances. But the caprice of valetudinarians, especially hypochondriacal persons, who form a large proportion of them, is such as to disable them from much candour of observation, and consequently to render their accounts very suspicious.

From a habit of ill health they are led naturally enough to a consideration of the subject, but being in general destitute of the fundamental principles of medical knowledge, they are very
partial

partial in observation, and still more prejudiced in their conclusions. Add to this an impetuosity and obstinacy of temper, which frequently attends such people, and which is very different from that disposition which is the most likely to develop philosophical truths by patient, accurate, and repeated observation. Several of these I have myself met with, who being prepossessed against its use, have given the most dreadful accounts of the ill effects of a small quantity of butter or other oily substance, yet I have prevailed with several of the most prejudiced of these that I have met with, to make the trial of its use a second time, and can safely say, that I have never observed any ill effects therefrom, provided the cautions beforementioned were attended to; but have always found it grateful and ac-

ceptable to the stomach, rather assistant than injurious to digestion, and where its nutritious properties were desired, highly serviceable, not only by its own proper qualities, but also by its rendering other food more agreeable, and of consequence liable to be taken in greater quantity.

The above remarks are applicable not to butter only, but also in a great measure to the fat of animals. There is indeed some difference; butter is always mixed with a proportion of animal mucilage; which renders it more miscible with the juices of the body, but at the same time more apt to become rancous. Vegetable oils are free from this, but at the same time by long keeping are capable of becoming rancid also, and as all those we use in this country internally, come from

from abroad, and of consequence must have been long kept, they are seldom if ever free from a taint of this kind.

Animal fats are also liable to rancescency, and also to a higher degree of putrefaction; but as they are always eaten (except in salted meat) before this has time to take place it is of little consequence, and indeed the difference between these and butter, with respect to their effects on the human body, is not sufficiently distinguished to render it of consequence sufficient to be particularly noticed.

Another of the forbidden articles is sugar, and the substances prepared with it. This is probably on account of its acescency to which it is undoubtedly, under some circumstances, liable in a considerable degree. But I much doubt

if it often exerts this quality in the human body, so as to be injurious. The repeated boilings that sugar, at least the better kinds of it used in this country, have undergone, check in a great measure its fermentative quality, and as it is also with us mostly used under circumstances wherein it has been exposed to a heat still more considerable, as in preserved fruits, pies, puddings, &c. this tendency is still farther corrected. Van Swieten mentions several examples of persons who have taken sugar in such quantities, as not to be esteemed so much a condiment as an article of food, and this without experiencing any of the ill effects that might be supposed to arise from such a diet, but on the contrary found it an innocent, nutritious, and healthy substance. I am satisfied, from experience, that even crude sugar is so far from adding to the acescency

tency of vegetables, that it checks it considerably ; and I believe it is a common remark, that several fruits, which eaten alone, create flatulence in many stomachs, have no such effects when taken with sugar ; and what is a great confirmation of this, it is well known that those fruits which contain the most sugar, especially if they approach to a farinaceous consistence, may be eaten with the greatest safety of any.

These circumstances being considered, it appears that sugar, at least in the quantity it is usually taken, is far from being injurious, even to persons of a weak stomach and digestion, nor indeed do I recollect ever to have heard any complaint on that account. It is now found to be not only an innocent but even a necessary part of the aliment

of * young children, to whom a food of an acescent nature would be ill adapted, as their stomachs are so subject to acidity; and moreover the fondness of children for this substance, is a great evidence of its salubrity, at least to them; and such a one likewise as we cannot suspect of being feigned or misrepresented, or of being any other than a natural instinct.

But in my opinion sugar is so far from exerting any ill effects in cases of weak digestion, that it is highly beneficial. In order to render digestion perfect, it is necessary that the oily and watery parts of our aliment should be intimately combined, and the separation of these, as I have before remarked, is

* Vide Armstrong on the diseases most fatal to infants, p. 137.

one of the strongest marks of the imperfection of this process. But nothing contributes more to the union of these substances than sugar, as is well known in many * pharmaceutical processes, and the idea of this has been carried so far by some medical writers, as to imagine that sugar by rendering the † oily parts of our bodies more apt to pass off by the excretories on account of their intimate union with the watery fluids, was apt to induce leanness, or a

* Van Swieten relates a story of a physician, who after enjoining a lady, as she valued the life of her child, not to suffer him to taste the smallest particle of sugar, immediately prescribed a mixture of a few ounces only in quantity, into which he directed an ounce of syrup to be put. He did not recollect that in all the officinal syrups, two thirds are composed of sugar. Van Swieten Comm. vol. v. p. 586.

† Olea nimis solvendo macilentiam inducere potest. Boerhaave Elem. Chem. vol. ii. p. 160.

wasting

wasting of the solids: § others from the opinion that it prevented the separation of the oily matter that forms fat from the blood, have concluded that it has a contrary effect, viz. that of increasing corpulence or fatness; others still have attributed to it the effect of producing a lentor on the fluids, retarding the circulation, obstructing the natural secretions, and thus occasioning or aggravating scorbutic, cachectic, hypochondriacal, or other disorders. General experience, however, has not shewn that sugar produces any of these effects in any remarkable degree. Its moderate use appears to be at least innocent, and perhaps of all that have been yet discovered, it is the most universally innocent and inoffensive, as well as the most simple sweet.

§ Lewis Materia Medica, article Saccharum.

The

The last I shall mention, and as I think the most exceptionable direction with respect to diet, is that of substituting brandy, or rum and water for common drink, in place of malt liquours, or other usual liquid drank at meals, and to quench thirst.

This, I am sorry to be obliged to observe, is now become too common a practice, and from being advised in extraordinary cases, as a temporary expedient by some eminent practitioners, is now commonly directed in almost all cases of weakness of the stomach and digestive organs by every apothecary, and that not as a thing of temporary necessity, but as a perpetual article of diet. I question, however, if any circumstance ever occurred in medicine more injurious to the science, or fatal to mankind, than this unfortunate piece
of

of advice. Haller * makes it a serious question, if spirituous liquors are to be counted among the poisonous or medicinal liquids, and laments the increase of their use throughout Europe, as a circumstance highly prejudicial to the health of mankind. And it seems particularly unfortunate, that at a period when the wisdom and humanity of the legislature restrained the use of spirituous liquors among the common people of this country, and also prevented the distribution of the same poison among the American Indians, on the fullest proofs and conviction of its mischievous consequence, that the same practice in effect should be advised by those whose duty and profession led them to study the health of their fellow creatures.

* Haller Physiolog. vol. vi. p. 257.

Some

Some may perhaps be of opinion that I have here expressed myself with greater warmth than the subject requires, but the melancholy events, to which I have myself been a witness, produced by this odious and insidious practice, prompt me to express my disapprobation of it in the strongest terms; but as I do not mean to condemn any practice without endeavouring at least to give some reasons for so doing, I shall next examine the arguments that may be brought in favour of, or urged in objection to it.

And first, it has been alledged, that brandy, or rum and water may be exactly proportioned in point of strength to malt drink, or any other liquour to which we have been accustomed, and of consequence with respect to that circumstance must be equally innocent.

That

That it may be every where procured in tolerable perfection, and is not liable to vary with the season of the year, and other circumstances which affect malt liquours, and instead of degenerating improves by age.

That it is itself incapable of either the vinous or acetous fermentation, and also checks it in other substances; whence it must be highly serviceable in stomachs wherein these fermentations are apt to be carried too far.

That it is drank commonly in the West Indies without any ill effects on the health or constitution.

With respect to the first of these I would observe, that though it be true that brandy or rum and water may be adjusted in point of strength (or its containing

taining a proportionable quantity of alcohol or rectified spirit) to any other fermented liquour, that it is not on that account equally innocent, or indeed similar in other respects. The fixible air is * dissipated in the distillation, the acid part evaporated, and the union between the spirit and the water, when they are mixed for drinking, is much less uniform and perfect than in a regularly fermented liquor. On this account probably it is found to be less efficacious in exciting the secretions, to be less diuretic and aperient, and at the same time to possess a greater degree of inflammatory stimulus. These properties are likely to be the cause of another effect of vinous spirits, viz. that of be-

* Dr. Hales found little or no fixible air in brandy, and it is a known fact, that vinous spirits will not precipitate lime water.

ing much more apt to produce disorders of the liver than wine or malt liquours.

Another inconvenience of little apparent consequence, but in reality very important, is, that the use of vinous spirits with water is exceedingly deceitful.

Those to whom this is recommended, begin with great care and caution to mix, with their own hands, the two liquours in proper proportion to each other. This précision, however, becomes in time tedious, and the adjustment of the proportion is intrusted to servants, who at first do it by measure, and soon after by guess, and quickly enlarge the proportion of spirit, which as it is done gradually is not perceived by the person who takes it, and they frequently proceed in this manner until
the

the *spirit exceeds the water in quantity.

The momentary relief, likewise, which this practice affords (as indeed all drams do) is an additional temptation to the continuation of it, and even to induce the unhappy sufferer to take it at various periods through the day, and even in the morning, when such liquors are peculiarly injurious; and this rather as a mode of relief, than as supplying a fluid for the purposes of drink. This is frequently the case with those afflicted with hypochondriacal or hysterical

* This is so far the case, that I have myself more than once known six or seven quarts of brandy consumed in the space of a week for many months, and even years together; and this by persons who imagined at the same time that they were strictly temperate; and what is more extraordinary, this happened frequently, though not always without any signs of intoxication.

complaints, to whom they indeed afford a temporary relief in the dejections of spirits, to which they are subject, but who, on the contrary, the soonest feel the ill effects arising from their habitual use.

As to the second circumstance mentioned in defence of this liquour, it is here of little consequence, as malt drink or cyder may, almost in every part of this country, be procured in tolerable perfection.

The next argument, that spirituous liquors are incapable both of the vinous and acetous fermentations, and on that account are eligible for persons of weak digestive faculties, is more plausible, and deserves greater attention.

Many

Many of those who give advice on this subject, and some writers seem to have considered the presence of air in the intestines as being always a noxious circumstance; but although this may sometimes be the case when it is accumulated in too great quantities, it is far from being always so, as it serves several important purposes in the animal œconomy.

Air is probably the principal agent in exciting the peristaltic motion of the intestines, by which the process of digestion and nutrition is carried on, and the food discharged. This motion is generally ascribed to the stimulus of the food passing through them, and distending them by its bulk, and by that irritation urging them to contraction.

E 2 But

But I apprehend, considering the length of the intestines, that the bulk of the food would be insufficient were it not assisted by air, with which the intestines of all animals newly killed are observed to be nearly filled.

This affords a cause of irritation to the whole canal of the intestines, and keeps up the peristaltic motion through them all. The air likewise thus protruded, serves the purpose of a solid body in expelling, and also in collecting the fæcal matter, so that it may be evacuated at proper intervals. Nor is air useful in the intestines merely on account of its mechanical properties; it is itself a powerful stimulus to the fibres of the tubes of a living animal.

Haller found air equally powerful with the strongest stimulants in exciting

ing the motion of the heart and arteries, and on that account concludes that it exerts a similar power on the the stomach * and intestines.

Thus it appears that we may sometimes be too anxious to guard against flatulence in our food, which caution is, I believe, often carried to a noxious length, and may, I conjecture, be not infrequently the cause of the costive habit which generally aggravates the disorder, and which brandy and water is so apt to occasion.

The stomachs indeed of hypochondriacal persons seem often to be oppressed

* It is extraordinary that the process of digestion should have the effect of changing the air taken into the bowels or discharged from the food, into inflammable air, which is the case with the air contained in the intestines of animals.

with flatulence, as appears from their frequent eructations. But I have never seen these relieved by the use of brandy and water, as a liquor used for the purpose of drink; and indeed I believe they are often a convulsive spasm of the stomach and oesophagus, which from the custom of its being encouraged on the idea of discharging what is noxious, becomes habitual. I have often seen this almost instantaneously produced by affections of the mind, and also relieved by cordials, without any discharge of wind; the former of which could have no effect in generating air, or the latter in absorbing it.

From the above account it seems probable, that the taking of spirituous liquours in this way is not likely to produce the good effects intended by it, and it is certainly often at least liable

ble to the bad effects in a great measure of habitual dram drinking. This custom is well known to be generally pernicious, yet it may not be here improper to mention some of its effects that have been more particularly remarked.

* It contracts the stomach itself and the passage from the stomach into the intestines. It also renders the fibres of the stomach callous and fragile, and insensible to every stimulus, even that of hunger. It contracts the diameter of the vascular system in general. It narrows the air vessels of the lungs even to a third of their former size. It tends to coagulate all the humours of the body, the aqueous excepted. It produces ossifications of the tendons and arteries, and in some instances of the pleura itself, and often brings on

* Vide Haller Physiol. Lib. XIX. § iii.

schirrhous of the whole viscera and glandular system. It induces also tremors, convulsions, and palsy of the nervous system.

These effects of the abuse of spirituous liquors, are delivered by a * writer of eminence and candour, and are far from appearing to be exaggerated, as undoubtedly many more might be added to them.

If it should be objected that all the foregoing bad consequences have been produced by the abuse of fermented liquours in general, it may be replied, that an excess in the latter is seldom so habitual, or so frequently repeated as the former from it's constant use is likely to be. That the constitutions

* Haller.

of those who indulge in the use of wine or malt liquours are in general more robust than those who use brandy or rum and water. That the use of spirits, even diluted to a proportionable strength, is not, as has been before observed, equally innocent with wine or malt liquours, but more inflammatory, and in every respect more apt to occasion the disorders above recited, those of the liver particularly.

Lastly, That the use of spirits in this way is more dangerous, as being more delusive and apt to be indulged in, as being often advised by the faculty, and the consequences of an excess are not so immediately ascribed to their true cause, as in the other instance, and of course not so likely to be guarded against.

As

As to the last mentioned plea in behalf of this kind of liquour, that it is taken without any inconvenience by the natives of the West India islands as their usual drink, I would observe, that though the fact be as represented, yet that the circumstances are by no means similar. The inhabitants of the West India islands use this liquour in a great measure from necessity; malt drink not being procurable, and scarce any wine, Madeira excepted, is capable of being kept to a proper age without turning sour.

Next, They are very cautious in respect to the quality of their liquour, and also as to the strength of their usual drink, which is always very weak in respect of the proportion of spirit, which is regularly observed, and also it is always joined with a considerable
 portion

portion of the juice of some acid fruit, as limes, lemons, oranges, &c. and with sugar, which not only correct the heating qualities of the spirit, but dispose the liquor to pass off by the proper secretions.

Rum and water thus corrected is also adapted to these climates on another account, as being a thin liquor, and free of all visciduity or tenacity, and consequently better suited to pass off by the thinner secretions, as urine and perspiration (the latter of which is very copious, and necessary to be constantly kept up) than malt liquor, or the more viscid wines, even though they could be had in perfection.

The vegetable diet also upon which the inhabitants of these islands, from the heat of the climate in a great measure

ture live, is also a considerable preventative of the ill effects of spirituous liquours.

The disorders which the latter produce are generally of the bilious or liver kind, or at least first appear in that form; and for the cure of these, the juices of fresh vegetables are especially adapted, which probably prevents many of the ill consequences which would otherwise probably accrue from the constant use of this liquor. But the persons in England to whom the taking of spirits with water is advised, are in general prohibited from touching any vegetable food: a circumstance in such cases doubly injurious, and I make no doubt that this restraint often greatly enhances the ill effects of the use of the spirits; and I think I have almost always observed, that those
who

who live in this way, soon acquire a yellow bilious complexion, which is often attributed to the complaint, but I doubt not is much more frequently owing to the manner of life.

Such are several of the inconveniencies which frequently occur from the abuse of this article of diet, to which catalogue, though many more might be added, yet the above are, I trust, sufficient to put us on our guard against its being rashly adopted.

I hope indeed that the practice will daily decrease, and with its diminution, I doubt not the health of the people will improve, or as Haller expresses himself on an occasion not very different, "*In Anglia certe, postquam paulum de suo furore plebs remisit, ipsi mores,*

mores, & valetudo civium in melius
revertuntur."

I have thus finished my remarks on several articles of diet usually recommended to valetudinarians. But at the same time that I condemn many of the directions on account of their being incautiously advised, I do not deny that several of the above restrictions, even the last, which I think the most exceptionable, may be *sometimes* necessary: but I believe that such necessity very seldom occurs, and that we ought to be fully satisfied of its existence before such a practice be recommended. It is not every trifling complaint of the stomach that will justify such advice, which indeed, in my opinion, should never be given but on the fullest experience, not only that the common mode of living disagreed, but also that some relief

relief was gained by the change, without an assurance of which it ought not to be continued ; nor should such a regimen be at all commenced without the maturest consideration and advice of the most experienced of the faculty, who will always think it an unfortunate circumstance to be obliged to prescribe such rules which they will only recommend for a limited period, and will as soon as possible advise to be discontinued, and the usual and natural course of life to be resumed.

F I N I S.

[53]

which was gained by the change, with-
out an alliance of which it could not
be continued; nor should such a re-
sult be as all commenced without the
mutual consultation and advice of
the most experienced of the faculty.
I will always think it an advantage
circumstances to be obliged to practice
such rules which they will only re-
gard for a moment, and will as
soon as possible be forgotten.
I and the said faculty to be
of the to be continued.



E I N I 2

